

^a THE ²⁵
External Peace
OF THE
CHURCH,

*Only attainable by a Zeal for Scripture
in its full Latitude, and by mu-
tual Charity; not by a Pretense
of Uniformity of Opinions.*

In a LETTER to —

By a Lover of Truth and Peace,

Search the Scriptures, John 5. 39.

By This shall all Men know that ye are my Disci-
ples, if ye have Love one to another. c. 13. 35.

Nobis, qui Sacramentum vera Religionis accepi-
mus, cum sit Veritas revelata divinitus, cum
Doctorem Sapientiae Ducemq; Veritatis Deum
sequamur, Universos sine ullo discrimine vel sexus
vel ætatis ad caeleste Pabulum convocamus.
Lactantius, Lib. 1.

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*The External Peace of the Church,
Only attainable by a Zeal for
Scripture in its full Latitude,
and by mutual Charity; not
by a Pretense of Uniformity of
Opinions.*

S I R,

WHILST every body complains of the unhappy State of Christianity, and the unaccountable Carriage of Christians towards each other; of Heats and Animosities in Religion, which even *Turks* and *Jews* are Strangers to; it pleas'd me to see You endeavouring to heal our Breaches, and to put us in the way of restoring Tranquillity to our Church. Your Design was certainly Laudable; but I cannot think it possible that the *External Peace of the Church* should ever be obtain'd by an Identity or Uniformity of Opinions. Every one contends with Zeal and Eagerness for his Opinions, and is for appropriating Truth un-

to himself: And every body finds his Adversary fixt and unmoveable, and as resolv'd to maintain his Notions, as if *Truth* had assumed a visible Shape, and were become conspicuous to Him. I own I cannot but commend such as espouse their Notions with a *proper Zeal*, and do not resign except upon *Conviction*, and are always *Open* and *Ready* for Conviction. But some Men look upon themselves as *wedded* to an Opinion, and think themselves obliged to defend it *for better for worse*, because it has receiv'd the stamp of *Custom* and *Authority*. Now Men that resign themselves upon *these* Principles and not upon *Knowledge*, or *Good Reason*; are *Christians*, only because they were born of *Christian-Parents*; and *Protestants*, because educated among such; But wou'd have prov'd as staunch *Papists*, *Presbyterians*, *Turks* or *Jews*, had they been born or bred up amongst such.

I grant you, That it has been an Universal Project to endeavour to bring Men to an *Uniformity of Opinion*; and to make them think the *same* about the most abstruse Subjects: That all Ages and all Parties (when in *Power*) seem agreed in this, that *Uniformity of Opinion* is absolutely necessary to the *Peace* of the *Church*; and therefore all have endeavoured in their Ways and in their Turns to *compel Men to come into their Notions*.—But then you must grant me, That

1500. *Years Experience* is long enough to convince Men of a Folly : That *Force* will make *Hypocrites*, but not *real Converts* ; and the *Peace of the Church* that is owing to *Hypocrisy*, is much the same as the *Profession of Love* to a *Tyrant* ; it lasts just so long as *Axes and Halts* hang over our Heads : That Mankind is much the same, and are governed by the same *Passions* ; and That from the same *Fountain*, the *Inquisition* in *Italy* or *Spain* arises, and the making *Local Truths necessary* any where.

You'll excuse me therefore, if I differ in Opinion in this Point from you ; and think that the *Peace of the Church* is only to be obtain'd by *showing a Zeal for the Scriptures* in the just Latitude in which God hath left them, and by *Love and Charity* to each Other.

To put it beyond dispute that the *Tranquillity of the Church* is this way *Only* to be obtain'd, I must search a little deeper than perhaps you may think necessary, and go to the Bottom of the Difference between us.

Let it therefore be a *First Principle* with you That *the great End and Design of Christianity* is, Not to make Men more *Learned*, to think more refinedly, or to make Men more *Wise* in *Worldly matters*, but to make them *more Good, more Holy, more Virtuous*, than otherwise they wou'd be. I insist not long on this, because it has been proved so evidently by so many

many. Yet I cannot but observe, that This Principle will make one smile at, and pity, those eager Squablers in Speculations, that think Christianity it self at stake, if their Notions are denied or thought to be disputable. A Man indeed cannot act a common part in the learned World, unless he is somewhat acquainted with the Opinions canvass'd; but I'm so far from thinking any thing really *Fundamental* or *Essential* in them, that I must own I think them but of little more consequence than any other *Philosophical* or *Metaphysical* Disputes; and read them accordingly, with good Humour, Love, and Charity; and when I see Men bewildred in the Labyrinths of Error, I read them with Pity. But when any thing is offered that touches Religion strictly so call'd, that offends against *Reason* and *Virtue* either *directly* or in its *Consequences*; if any one strikes at the things which promote our Esteem of *Goodness*, or attempts to *narrow* our Minds, and make Men in consequence grow *uncharitable*, *mean-spirited*, and act *below* their Dignity, then 'tis high time to *reprove*, *rebuke*, and *exhort*: Truth must be asserted: No respect is to be had to Persons further than we as Men, as Gentlemen, as Christians, are under Obligations to shew it: But *Amicus Plato, magis amica veritas*, must be our Rule. A

Second Principle is, to distinguish between *Fundamentals* and *not Fundamentals*, and to make

make a great difference in contending for the the One and the Other. As the *former* are the Life and Soul of Christianity, they are to be contended for as such; the *latter* are to be look'd upon with more or less Concern; as they more or less affect our Morals. The Mischief now is, that every Question almost is made a *Fundamental* one; and the consequence of that is, *the Peace of the Church* is broke, its *Tranquillity* disturbed; and *Uncharitableness* reigns uncontroll'd. Now to help you what I can in this important case,

By *Fundamentals*, I mean, such Propositions which cannot be denied or rejected consistent with Salvation. These Propositions being of two Sorts, either such as relate to *Simple Belief*, or else such as relate to *Practice*; I shall here confine my self to the *Former*. In order to find out these, I cannot but think it a

1st Principle, *That the Sacred Scriptures are the sole Rule of our Faith, and contain in them all things Necessary to our Salvation.* This cannot be express'd in Words which carry a greater Authority in them, than those of the VIth Article. *Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to Salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any Man that it should be believed as an Article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary*

cessary to Salvation. This is so consonant to Reason, and the Notions that all Mankind have of God, as *Wise* and *Just* and *Good*; that one cannot but wonder how the *Jews* and *Roman Catholicks*, have already, and others shew a great Readiness to bring in their respective *Cabbala's*. For since God is allowed by all, to have given us a *Written Will*; if he has been defective in discovering therein what he expects from us, 'tis plain that he has taken care of *Small Matters*, and has omitted *Great* ones; which can never be consistent with *Earthly Wisdom*, much less with *Heavenly*. Nor can it be reconciled to *Justice*, to exclude from foederal Rights, Persons whom He declares in his *Written Will* that he is ready to embrace with the Arms of Mercy; and yet to leave them to their *own* uncertain *Guesses* at what his Terms of Acceptance are; or to the more uncertain *Notions* and *Traditions* of *Others*, to find out, what He expects from us. Nor can it be reconciled to *Goodness*, (which is, *A sincere Desire to promote the Happiness of Others*;) *deficere in necessariis*, to be wanting in the very things which should lead a Man to Happiness: and yet to direct them in innumerable things (comparatively speaking) of far less concern.

How many Controversies doth this single Principle put an end to? Would Men be contented to be but *Wise to Salvation*, and
not

not to pry into curious Speculations which are acknowledged by all to be infinitely above their Reaches : Or, if they will do that, would they let others sit down contented with what God himself has told them, and think that Men may be saved if their *Faith* extends no farther than *Revelation*; How would *Peace* and *Christian Charity* abound ! What an advanc'd Step would this be towards the *External Tranquillity* of the *Church* ! Why must every ones Faith be fitted to the Standard of his Neighbour's Notions, tho' not warranted by Scripture ; or else, *Procrustes* like, they must have it stretch'd or lopped till it exactly squares with other peoples Plans ? What should hinder That person from being saved, who *believes* whatever God has thought fit to teach him, who sits down contented with That, and takes care to *practise* what God has commanded him to *practise* ? He that sincerely believes the Scriptures, and leads a pious Life, directing his Actions by that Rule ; may *err*, but cannot be an *Heretick*. Do you think it possible, if Men had kept to this Principle alone, to have drawn the Saw of Contention so long, concerning the *Decrees* of God and the *Order* of Them ? Do you imagine that the *Church* of *Rome* could ever have brought in the 100th part of her Follies and Absurdities, and have made them *necessary to Salvation* ; unless she had quitted the

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the *Scriptures*, and taken in *Tradition*? Whence could have arisen the *Arians*, *Eutychians*, *Macedonians*, and almost all the *Heresies* and *Schisms* of Old, if Men had Religiously observ'd but this one Rule? But the Itch of Men has always been to form an *Hypothesis*, (give me leave to call it so, for it is in fact no more,) in *Divinity*; and by blending false Notions in *Philosophy*, and *ungrounded* Notions in *Scripture* together, they have made the Idol which they readily fall down and worship. But to proceed.

2dly. Because the *Scriptures* contain several Books, and upon variety of Subjects; we may draw our Search into a much narrower Compass, and confine our selves to the Limits of the *New Testament*; and there alone see all that is, or can be, necessary to the Salvation of *Christians*. This will cut off a great many tedious and unnecessary Controversies; which can be allowed no good Foundation, if we consider the Law of *Moses* as given Only to the *Jews*, and that it has now given way to a Law of a more reasonable Service; That the *Prophets* and the *Historians* are Narrators of Facts; And whatever is moral in Them, in the *Psalms*, or other Books, are Parts of the Law of Nature, and therefore out of our Enquiry. These being all written long before our Saviour's Time, cannot contain any thing Fundamental

damental of, that is, peculiar to, Christiani-
ty. But,

3dly. Because one would search for Jewels
in as little a Compass as maybe 'Tis certain, *That*
each of the Evangelists in particular hath given
us the whole Gospel of Christ, and every thing
which is required of us to Believe as neces-
sary to Salvation. This I know you'll not
allow me as as an Axiom; but my Endeavours
have been entirely superseded by the
Incomparable Mr *Chillingworth*, who has de-
monstrated this, especially of *St Luke's Gos-*
pel, as clearly as any Proposition in *Euclid*.
I shall therefore only transcribe his Words c.
4. § 43, — "*But for St Luke, that he hath*
"*written such a perfect Gospel; in my judg-*
"*ment, it ought to be, with them that believe*
"*him, no manner of Question. Consider first,*
"*the Introduction to his Gospel; where he de-*
"*clares what he intends to write, in these*
"*Words: Forasmuch as many have taken in*
"*Hand to set forth in order a Declaration*
"*of those things, which are most surely be-*
"*lieved among us; even as they delivered*
"*them unto us, which from the Beginning*
"*Were Eye-witnesses and Ministers of the*
"*word; It seemed good to Me also, having*
"*had perfect Understanding of all things*
"*from the very first, to write unto thee in*
"*order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou*
"*might'st know the certainty of those things*
"*wherein thou hast been instructed.* Add to

" *this place, the Entrance to his History of the*
 " *Acts of the Apostles : The former Treatise*
 " *have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus*
 " *began both to do and to teach, until the*
 " *day in which he was taken up. Weigh*
 " *well these two places, and then answer me*
 " *freely and ingeniously to these Demands.*
 " *1. Whether St. Luke doth not undertake*
 " *the very same thing, which He says many*
 " *had taken in Hand ? 2. Whether this were*
 " *not, to set forth in order a Declaration of*
 " *those Things which are most surely belie-*
 " *ved amongst Christians ? 3. Whether the*
 " *whole Gospel of Christ, and every necessary*
 " *Doctrine of it, were not surely believ'd among*
 " *Christians ? 4. whether they which were*
 " *Eye-Witness and Ministers of the*
 " *Word from the Beginning, delivered not*
 " *the whole Gospel of Christ ? 5. Whether*
 " *he doth not undertake to write in order,*
 " *those things whereof he had perfect Un-*
 " *derstanding from the first ? 6. Whether*
 " *he had not perfect Understanding of the*
 " *whole Gospel of Christ ? 7. Whether he*
 " *doth not undertake to write to Theophilus,*
 " *of All those things wherein he had been in-*
 " *structed ? 8. And whether he had not been*
 " *instructed, in all the necessary parts of the*
 " *Gospel of Christ ? 9. Whether in the other Text,*
 " *All things which Jesus began to do and*
 " *teach, must not at least imply, all the principal*
 " *and necessary things. 10, and 11. Whether, all*
 " *those Articles of the Christian Faith, without*
 " *the*

" the belief whereof no Man can be saved, be one
 " the Principal, and most necessary things which
 " Jesus taught? 12. And lastly, Whether
 " many things which St. Luke hath wrote in
 " his Gospel be not less Principal, and less ne-
 " cessary, than all and every one of these?
 " When you have well considered these Propo-
 " sals, I believe you'll be very apt to think
 " (if St. Luke be of Credit with you, that all
 " Things necessary to Salvation are certainly
 " contain'd in his Writings alone.

Into how small a compass, then are the
 Credenda of Christianity brought? How ma-
 ny Disputes, which are canvass'd with as
 much warmth, as if Christianity it self lay at
 stake, are cut off from being Necessary;
 since not One Word about them, is in St. Luke,
 or any of the Evangelists.

I am sensible that I might contract my
 search into a much narrower Compass, (tho'
 some may think it already too strait.) But I
 choose to fix my Standard here, because I think
 our Saviour himself and his Words are the
 properest Determiners of this Question; and
 because I think it easy enough for any one
 to judge, whether a Dispute be determined
 on either side by St. Luke; or whether, by
 the Circumstances of it, it be a Fundamental
 of Christianity.

But what *Criteria*, what Marks can be laid
 down, whereby we may be able to judge
 Which are those Propositions, which cannot
 be disbelieved under pain of being excluded
 from

from the Covenant of God? *Which* are they that are So Fundamental, that without them we cannot be Members of Christ's Church, and Heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven? St. *Luke* contains in his Gospel an infinite number of Propositions, and how shall we distinguish *Necessary ones* from such as are not so? To this I say

1st. All points necessary to Salvation, must be such as are *Plain* and *Easy* and *Intelligible* to the *meanest* Capacity. This is evident, because our Saviour preached to the *Meanest* of the People, as much as to the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* and *Doctors* of the Law; and the *Meanest* of People have an Equal Claim to Salvation, have equal Hopes and equal Affurances of it, with the *Wise* and most Learned. 'Tis own'd by all, that the Bulk of Mankind is very illiterate, capable of no refined and nice Speculations: Their Heads and Hands are fully imployed in providing for the Necessity of Nature; and 'tis well if with constant industry and Care, they can satisfy their own and their Childrens Appetites, and cover their Nakedness. The Heads of Ploughmen and Day-labourers are as little adapted to *Speculations* in *Divinity*, as to the Understanding of the nicest *Problems* of *Geography*. Unless therefore the *Articles* of *Faith* were easy and intelligible to such, 'Tis impossible for the Bulk of Mankind to be saved: Nay, those whose Heads seem better

better turned for Thinking, and, by their Leisure, Opportunities of reading, and Application to Books, are look'd upon as Learned; even These Men often argue so wretchedly, and see so little a way into the abstruser Theological Questions, that t'wou'd be more than probable that They wou'd fall short of Heaven as much as the illiterate Multitude. Sublime Notions and deep Reasonings upon the Mysterious Parts of Christianity, are the *Peculium* of a *few, very few*, in a Generation: And if *Fundamentals* were so *difficult* to be understood, as some *even Good Men* unthinkingly make them; it must infinitely more shorten the Number of the *Elect*, than ever has yet been conceiv'd

2dly. The *Sense* of Points of *mere Belief*, must be *certain* and *fixed*. For if a Proposition be capable of two or three different Meanings, by reason of the Ambiguity of the Expression; it cannot be certainly known, *what* God requires of us. Now as 'tis inconsistent with *Goodness* or *Justice*, for any one to require of a Servant to go to such or such Places, under the penalty of the severest Punishments, by such a *particular* Way, which by reason of a blind Discription may agree to a *great many different* Ways; so t'wou'd be as irreconcilable to the *Goodness* or *Justice* of God, to require the *explicit* belief of any Point as *necessary* to Salvation in a *certain* Sense, when the Words are such

as carry with them *several* Meanings. You must allow me this; or else, (which is as much as I wou'd contend for,) if Points of *meer* Belief may be *uncertain* and *undeterminate* in their Meaning in the Word of God, 'tis sufficient that our Faith be *so* too. For 'twou'd be *unjust* to require our Assent to a Proposition in a *determinate* Sense, which is reveal'd to us in an *Undetermin'd* one. This, as God who is Good and Just and Faithful, never *will* do, so Man never *can*, unless he will lay aside all Pretence to those Virtues.

3dly. Our Saviour, who was All-wise and absolutely Infallible, Preached to the People *All that was necessary* for them to Believe; else He wou'd not have *fulfill'd the Will of Him that sent him*. He press'd those things *most*, which were *most material*; and urg'd the *Principals* of Christianity, more than the *less weighty* things of his Law. He can in no sense be call'd a *Wise Man*, that omits *Essentials*, to speak of *Trifles*, and presses *unnecessary* Circumstantials, instead of the *principal* and *chiefest* Matters He is concern'd in.

4thly. What was sufficient to make a Man a *Christian* in our Saviour's Time, is certainly sufficient to make a Man such *Now*; since He that was a Christian Then, believed all that was necessary to be believed.

I cannot but think the Rules I have hitherto been laying down so natural and easy, that

that every *Protestant* must readily agree to them. But then the *Consequences* carry such a *String* in their Tails, and strike so plainly at the *Spirit* of *Imposing*, of *Persecuting*, and of *Lording it over the Heritage of Christ*, of *confining Salvation*, of making *Parties*, *Factions*, *Heresies*, and *Schisms*; that I shou'd have wonder'd they never have been put in Practice, did not I see *Humane Nature* at so great an *Enmity* with the *Spirit of Christ*. But *thus it must be*; or how shou'd the *Scriptures* be fulfill'd?

The main Point in all Theological Disputes, is to distinguish justly between what is *Humane*, and what is *Divine*; and to shew our Zeal and Concern accordingly; since 'tis agreed on all sides, that what is *Humane* cannot be a *Fundamental* of Christianity. The Rules I have endeavoured to establish, will clearly (I think) determine This. In the great and intricate Dispute concerning the *Ever-Blessed Trinity*, there is more (I think) that is purely *Humane*, than a Man at first wou'd conceive. All that the Scriptures have determined, is, That there is a *Father*, a *Son*, and a *Holy Spirit*, Matt. 28, 19 &c. Mark I. 10, 11. Luke 3. 22 &c. and in several other places. Their respective Offices to Us, are likewise declared in a great many Places. That there is but *One God*, is frequent. The *second Person*, is *Styled God*, in some few Places: And in

John 5. 7. (suppose that place *genuin*, which I own I *vehemently suspect*.) 'tis said that the *Three which bare record in Heaven are One*, *iv*, *Unum*. In all this, all sides of all Denominations are perfectly agreed, be they *Arians*, *Semiarians*, *Socinians*, or *Orthodox*: And thus much, all are agreed is *Divine*. But each of These, and a great many more have set themselves to work, to contrive a Scheme to reconcile the Difficulty, *How these Three are One*. Now since the *Scriptures* have nowhere determined this Point; all the Solutions of it by *One Essence*, *One Substance*, *One in Will or Power*, &c. are justly to be look'd upon as so many several *Hypotheses* to solve a *Phænomenon* by. And, each of them being purely *Humane*, the *Invention of Man*, *Humane Consequences*, and what each particular Person will allow to have a *Possibility of Error*; to make it *necessary to Salvation*, to give into *this or that Scheme*, or to build *religious Practice* upon the *Particularities* of this or that Scheme, seems as absurd, as if a *Cartesian* or a *Platonist*, or an *Aristotelian* shoud insist upon each of their respective Systems, as absolutely Necessary to the Being of Philosophy. Has *St. Luke* or any of the *Evangelists* determined *How the Three are One*? If not, 'tis either *not Fundamental* to know it, or else *None of the Evangelists* have wrote so perfect Gospels as to contain even the *Principals* of Christianity. And yet

yet this is the Question for which so many have been proscribed, massacred, plundered, burnt: Is it *easy, plain, and intelligible* to the *meanest* Capacity? And yet it puzzles the most refined Heads. Is its Meaning *certain* and *fixt*, when it has been controverted these 1400 Years? The Truth is, 'tis not difficult to determine what is the Meaning of *One*, [*iv, Unum,*] in this Controversy, from the *constant and unvaried* meaning of that Expression in Scripture: But *Local Truths* must prevail, till Men will be brought to make Scripture the *alone Rule of Faith*, and live in *Mutual Love and Charity*.

The *Incarnation* of our Lord, and the Union of his *Divine* and *Human Nature*, has given an Occasion too much to be lamented by every good Christian, for Heresies and Schisms, *Apollinarius* has gone one way, *Nestorius* a second, and others have form'd other Schemes to explain those Words, (in themselves not very difficult,) *The Word was made Flesh*, John 1. 13. Had not the Itch of *Curiosity* and the *Powers of Faction*, and the *Vain-Glory* of being the Head of a Party, work'd strongly upon the Minds of Men; They had left this Article in the *Scripture-generals*; at least they would not have made their respective *Interpretations* to be *essential* to Christianity: They had kept up *Peace and Charity*, and never disturbed the Tranquillity of the Church by defining the *Modus* of what They agreed *Incomprehensible*.

Shall

Shall I instance further in the Disputes concerning the *Satisfaction, Merit, and Intercession* of our Blessed Saviour? Or in the *Procession* of the Third Person of the Trinity? In the antient *Monothelites*? or in our modern Controversies of a *Sacramental Presence*? In these and a Thousand other Notions, had the Church of Christ abstained from teaching *doctrinally*, and building any *Practise* upon, human and fallible Determinations; had they prevented the Disputes in their Originals, by declaring it sufficient to believe no more than what was revealed; Those Floods of Opinions, which have overwhelm'd Us *on whom the ends of the World are come*, had never reach'd us; The Opinions, had probably died with their Authors, and their *Memorial* had perish'd with them. The Determinations of Councils may be very *true* and *right*: But when those Determinations have been made *Necessaries*, the *Tranquillity* of the Church has been disturbed, and its *Peace* broken upon these very accounts; and such a Faith as once was *sufficient* for Salvation is, by a strange Spirit of *lording it*, made by Man *insufficient*. Every thing that is perhaps *True* and *Right* must not immediately be conceiv'd an *Essential*. No one is absolutely obliged to *know Every Proposition* even in the *Scripture* itself, tho' 'tis certain that the Truths therein contained have a much better claim to *Fundamental Doctrines* than

than any others can have. But as God alone has the Power of prescribing to us the *Terms of Salvation*, of telling us what will please him, and what he expects from us: to clog his Offers with *new Terms*, is to *fit in the Temple of God as God*, and to lay claim to *Infallibility*.

Wou'd it not have answered all *good Ends* much better, to have only determin'd against the Innovations of particular Persons, that such or such Opinions are not required in Scriptures; and not to have shewn such a readiness to anathematize Persons for the sake of Opinions? *Variety of Opinions* do no damage to the Church, if *Will and Passion and Interest* do not interfere. Why may not, *contrary Sides* of a Question be maintained, and debated with Freedom, even to the *Advantage, Instruction, and Profit* of the Church? For if *Peace and Progress in Virtue* be the Design of Men; those Ends may be most effectually prosecuted and obtained, without, forcing Men to *pretend* an Agreement in Opinions. Men may meet in the same Point, tho' One goes one Way and another goes another. Nay, I do not see but that *different Opinions*, contended for with *Christian Temper, a decent Zeal, and perfect Charity*, might tend much more to the Increase of Knowledge in the World, to the Honour of Christianity, and to the Glory of God, than any *Uniformity* whatever in Matters of Opinion.

For

For what Evidence is it of the Power of Religion, or of our Humility, or Resignation to the Will of God, to love only the Man who agrees or rather pretends to agree exactly in all things with us? In short: *The Unity of the Spirit* being to be kept by the *Bond of Peace*, by *Charity* and *mutual Forgiveness*, but not by the vain and impossible Pretence of an *Identity* of Opinions; Let the Channel be kept open, and Peace be prosecuted Christianly and in good earnest; and the *God of Peace and Order* will be glorified in the most rational way. For this, take the Words of the incomparable Mr. Chillingworth c. 4. § 16. "This
 " presumptuous Imposing of the Senses of
 " Men upon the Words of God, the speci-
 " al Senses of Men upon the general Words
 " of God, and laying them upon Mens Consci-
 " ences together under the equal Penalty of
 " Death and Damnation; This vain Conceit,
 " that we can speak of the things of God
 " better than in the Words of God; This
 " Deifying our own Interpretations, and Ty-
 " rannous enforcing them upon others; This
 " restraining of the Word of God from that
 " Latitude and Generality, and the Under-
 " standings of Men from that Liberty where-
 " in Christ and the Apostles left them, is and
 " hath been the only Fountain of all the Schisms
 " of the Church, and That which makes
 " them immortal; the common Incendiary
 " of Christendom, and that which—tears in-
 " to

" to pieces not the Coat, but the Bowels and
 " Members of Christ; ridente Turca nec
 " dolente Judæo. Take away these Walls
 " of Separation, and all will quickly be one.
 " Take away this Persecuting, Burning, Curs-
 " ing, Damning of Men for not subscribing
 " to the words of Men as the words of God;
 " Require of Christians, only to believe Christ,
 " and to call no Man Master but him only; Let
 " those leave claiming Infallibility that have
 " no Title to it; and let them that in their
 " Words disclaim it, disclaim it likewise in
 " their Actions: In a word, take away Tyran-
 " ny, which is the Devils instrument to support
 " Errors and Superstitions and Impieties in the
 " several parts of the World, which cou'd not
 " otherwise long withstand the Power of
 " Truth; I say, take away Tyranny, and
 " restore Christians to their just and full
 " liberty of captivating their Understanding
 " to Scripture only; And as Rivers, when
 " they have a free Passage run all to the
 " Ocean; so it may well be hoped, by Gods
 " Blessing, that an Universal Liberty thus
 " moderated, may quickly reduce Christendom
 " to Truth and Unity. These Thoughts of
 " Peace, I am perswaded, may come from the
 " God of Peace, and to his Blessing I commend
 " them. You see, Sir, the reasonableness
 " of insisting upon the just Latitude of Scrip-
 " ture; and the plain Connexion there is
 " between such a Liberty, and Unity. 'Tis
 true,

true; that *Peace* and *Charity* must make up Part of this Composition, and an *Essential* One too; but in requiring This, no more is required than what Our Saviour himself and the Apostles have in innumerable places laid down as fundamental and the very Badge of Christians.

As therefore, I think, but two ways of reducing Christians to *Unity*, and by that means, of restoring *Peace* to the Church; One of them, and the *only possible* one, (unless recourse be had to Miracle,) I have been insisting on and pressing to you. But as you have been thinking of the *Other*, and conceive it a good Expedient; I'll now show you the *Impossibility* of a real *Uniformity of Notions*, and consequently the *Impossibility* of founding the *Peace of the Church* upon such an *impracticable Scheme*. And this I shall do, by considering us

1. As Men.
2. As Christians.
3. As Protestants. and
4. As Church of England Men.

1st. If we consider our selves as Men, an *Identity of Notions* is absolutely *impossible*. Whosoever considers Mankind, their different *Parts* and *Capacities*, their respective *Passions* and *Affections*, their *Interest*, their *Prejudices*, and *Education*; will easily see the absolute *impossibility* of such an *Uniformity of thinking*, as is desired. Mens *Parts* are visibly very different;

different; and their *Constitutions* and *Circumstances* make so wide a difference in Men of *equal* Parts, that it argues nothing but *want of Reflection*, to be surpriz'd at the Variety we meet with. Some have hardly any determinate Ideas at all; and to expect that such shou'd have the same Opinions with the Men of clearest Heads, is to expect good Pilots of Men that never saw the Seas or Sands, or Rocks they are to pass. These are such, who follow the Steps of those whom their respective Interests or Parties tie them too; and for want of Sagacity and Penetration, they can almost as difficultly pursue the Links of the Chain of Truth, as a Person blinded can pursue a strait Path. Others rest upon Foundations False and Uncertain, and therefore embrace Error for Truth, by a kind of careless Necessity, arising, not from *want of Parts* or Abilities, but from the want of *Use* and *Practice* in the Ways of Thinking. Others still there are, who cannot abstract from *Sounds* and *Words*, but are perpetually deceived with Ambiguities. But nothing is so visibly and universally Powerful, as *Prejudice*. Interest, or *Humour*, may sway with *many*; but 'tis *Prejudice* that byasses *most*. And unless a Way cou'd be found out to make Men always hit upon Truth at first, and then make them equally, and steadily pursue it; and to lay aside *Prejudice*, *Partiality*, *Interest*, and all sorts of *by Ends*; *Uniformity of Opinion*

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will be as impossible, as Serenity and Cloudiness, Light and Darkness, at the same time. The most *erroneous* Person, supposing him to be *Honest* and *Sincere*, is as positive in his Error, as the greatest Defender of Truth can be for Truth: And unless we cou'd be able to discover some *Criteria* of clear and distinct Perceptions and make all Men apply them as the Rules of their Thoughts; we must e'en be contented to be *Honest* only, to do our best, and leave the rest to God. What *Salvian* say's of the *Arian* Goths and *Vandals*, is the common and indisputable Reasoning of all Mankind: "*What They are to us, we are the same to Them.—Truth is with Us; They presume it to be with them: The Honour of God, is with us; but They think, what They believe, to be the Honour of God: They, do not their Duty; but to Them, this is the great Duty of Religion: They, are impious; but They think That to be true Piety, &c.*"

'Tis owing wholly to tyrannizing over the Minds of Men, that Truth is forc'd to shift her Face. That, is true Orthodoxy in France; which must not be mention'd in England: And that in Holland, or Scotland, or Geneva; which here, if but hinted at with seeming Approbation, is thought to deserve the heaviest *Anathema's*. And that which shews this Tyranny the most, is, That if any one dares to examine an Opinion, and

and finds a strong Argument, or thinks he has found one, against any received Notion; he is presently look'd upon as *Luke-warm*. And if he rests not satisfied with the first Attempts upon him for *Conviction*, he is given over as an *Heretick* or an *Apostate*. As if *Understanding* was given to the *Men of Power only*, to make Theirs the Rule and Standard of other Mens Minds: Or, as if *Truth* and *Examination* were *arbitrary*. Look into the several parts of the Habitable World; and, by the *contradictory Orthodoxy* in each of them, see if *Truth* is to be measured by that Standard. Every one is esteemed an *Heretick*, that varies from the *Establish'd* Opinions of his Country. And in Fact 'tis the *Laws* of Nations, which *now a days* determine *Heterodoxy*, and give That Denomination to any one that recedes from them in their Determinations about Speculative Theology.

'Tis out of Dispute that some Opinions are not to be determin'd *clearly* till *Elias* comes, for want of sufficient *Data*. We see but as in a *Glass darkly*, and know but in part. Whether the *Nestorian* or the *Apollinarian* Scheme concerning our Saviour's *Incarnation* may not be the true one, 'tis somewhat hard to say; or whether it be a *third*, as others have thought more probable. The Texts of Scripture are very few, that give us Light in this Point. 'Tis certain (I think) that one of these Notions must be true; Either that the

Logos became *Incarnate*, dwelling like to a Humane Soul in the Body of Christ, and so was made in the likeness of Man, as St. Paul speaks; or else that (strictly and Philosophically speaking, and taking the Term Person for an Intelligent Agent,) there were two Persons in Christ, as well as two Natures: (The first is the *Arian* or, more vulgarly, the *Apollinarian*; the second, is the *Nestorian Heresie*;) Or else we must say, with the generality of Modern Christians, that the Incarnation was by an Union of the two Natures, so as to make of them one Person or Intelligent Agent, without Conversion or Confusion of Substances. The Grounds of each of these Notions, are (I think) chiefly these.

John i. 14. *The Word was made Flesh,*
 Rom. 8, 3—*his only Son in the likeness of Sinful Flesh.*

Rom. 9. 5, *Of whom, as concerning the Flesh, Christ came, who is over all God blessed for ever,*

Phil. 2. 7, 8. *Who—took upon him the Form of a Servant, and was made in the likeness of Men, and being found in Fashion as a Man.*

Heb. 2. 14, 16, 17. *Forasmuch then as the Children are partakers of Flesh and Blood, he also (i. e. Christ) took part of the same.—For verily he took not on him the nature of Angels, but He took on him the Seed of Abraham.*

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Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like his Brethren.

1 Tim. 3. 16. God was manifest in the Flesh. [If that be the true Reading; which is very doubtful.]

1 John. 4. 2, 3. Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh.

3. 8. The Son of God was manifested.

1 Pet. 1. 2. — was manifest in these last times.

Colos. 2. 9. In him dwelleth all the Fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Ephes. 4. 5. One Lord, one Faith.

Heb. 10; 5, 10. A body hast thou prepared me. And, Through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ.

These ('tis certain) are the chief Materials, perhaps the only ones, upon which the Doctrine of the Hypostatical Union has been built. Now it must be own'd, that each of the before-mention'd Schemes have their Advantages, and each too their Disadvantages.

1st. The Arians or Apollinarians, (between which there was no very great difference, tho' some there was,) conceive the Logos to have actuated or inform'd the Body of our Saviour, instead and in the place of the Rational Soul; so that, with Them, Our Blessed Lord consisted of only a Body, and the Word. Upon this Principle, the Texts which assert that Christ took on him the Seed of Abraham; was made in the likeness of Men; God was manifest

rest in the Flesh; Came in the Flesh; in the Likeness of Sinful Flesh; in him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead; The Word was made Flesh, was Incarnate; All these Texts of Scripture, I say, are, upon the Apollinarian Scheme, natural, plain, and easy. But then, though This accounts best for the Incarnation, yet to many it seems not to account so well for the Perfection of our Saviour's Humanity. But it teaches a most proper Unity of Person, as making the God-Man Jesus Christ to be strictly One Intelligent Agent.

A 2d. Notion was that of *Nestorius*, who carefully distinguishing the *two Substances* in Christ is accused of introducing *Two Persons*. This Accusation was laid against Him, only as a Consequence of his denying the *Virgin Mary* to be *The Mother of God*; who, He thought, with much greater Propriety of Speech ought only to be styl'd, *The Mother of Him that was God*. 'Tis certain that all the Texts aforecited, agree with his Solution in their *Literal Meanings*. But then to solve the *Unity of Person*, must be allowed a Difficulty. For certain it is, that a *rational Soul* is *One Intelligent Agent*, and the *Logos* is *Another*. The *Unity* therefore in the *Nestorian Doctrine*, must be but *Figurative*, viz. by a perfect *Compliance* and *Submission of Will* in the *Inferior* to the *Superior*, by a *total Resignation* of One to the Other. Which tho' it be not a *strict Metaphysical Unity*, yet answers all

all the *Ends* of *such an Unity*, in his *Opinion*. To which purpose he might assert, that a *Moral Unity* is the *only Unity* of *Persons* in Scripture. That the Text in *St John*, 1 Epist. ch. 5 ; 7, 8, *These Three are One*, (if those Words were genuine ;) And, *These Three agree in one*, is meant plainly of *Agreement* in *Testimony* ; as is that in *St John's Gospel*, ch. 10, 30, [*I and the Father are One*,] of *Power*, *Will*, and *Consent*. So likewise ch. 17 ; 11, 21, 22, 23. *That They may be One as we are One*, being spoken concerning the *Men* which the *Father* had given to *Christ* out of the *World* ; is a plain Indication, that *Unity of Will and Consent*, is the *Unity of Persons* in Scripture. Thus too, *Rom.* 12 ; 5, 'tis said, *We being Many are One body in Christ* ; and ch. 15 ; 6, *That we may with One Mind, and One Mouth glorify God* ; And again, 1 *Cor.* 3 ; 6,—8, *I (Paul) have planted, Apollos watered* ;—Now he that planteth, and he that watereth, are One : How ? not in *Substance*, but *Consent, Testimony, Will*. So too, ch. 10, 17, *We being many, are One Bread and One Body* ; which is explain'd in the next Words, *For we are all partakers of that One Bread*. And thus too, *Eph.* 2 ; 14, *Christ* is said to have made both *Jews and Gentiles, One, by breaking down the middle Wall of Partition between them*. These, I think, are all the Passages of Scripture, which mention any *Unity of Persons* ; and All of them seem

seem at least to favour, if not expressly assert, a *Figurative* Unity. But this Answer not being thought equal to the Difficulty objected,

A 3d. Opinion has generally prevailed, which asserts our Saviour, *Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable Soul, and Humane Flesh subsisting; Who altho' he be God and Man, yet he is not Two, but One Christ: One, not by Conversion of the Godhead into Flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether, not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person; for as the reasonable Soul and Flesh is One Man, so God and Man is One Christ.* That this Notion is obscure and difficultly to be apprehended, is to be thought no Objection; because 'tis upon a Subject allowed by all, to be above our Reason. In this Life, 'tis certain, we know but in part, and Prophecy in part, and see but thro' a Glass darkly.

'Tis plain, I think, from these Solutions of the *Hypostatical Union*, that the Scriptures have not given us Grounds large enough to raise a *sure and certain*, and what may be styled by a Man that studies Things impartially, *One only probable Opinion* upon this Question: But yet here is enough, to make no Man *Positive and Dogmatical*. When *Apolinarius*, or *Nestorius*, or their Adversaries, each taught their own Notions for *Doctrines of Christianity*; would it not have answer'd the

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the Ends of *Peace* better, to have determined *This* only, that the Scriptures *required* the *Belief* of *no* such particular Notions? Wou'd it not have made much more for the *Tranquillity* of the Church, to have left this as it lay in the Scripture; and not to have enlarged the Catalogue of Heresies, by determining positively against, only at least such *appearances* of *Reason*? But be this as it will: When the *Heretical* Sides of a Question seem so *Probable*, and have such *Appearances* of a *perfect Agreement* between *Scripture* and *Reason*; can you think it likely that *every body* will be brought to take what is call'd the *Orthodox* Side of a Question, which 'tis granted has not sufficient *data* in Scripture to determine it?

But as this Question is not so easily determinable, there are others that are very *plainly determined* in Scripture; (at least I think so;) which yet, because the *Deductions* are *long*, and the *Connections* somewhat *remote*; because the Texts are *numerous*, and lye *immethodical*; are as often misunderstood, and the Texts misapplied, as one can conceive. For this, I appeal to all who have treated with any accuracy concerning the *Doctrine of the Trinity*. There are more than 500 Passages of the *New Testament* alone, collected by a late Learned Author upon this Subject. All of these must be applied consistently to *one particular Scheme*, in order

to find out the Truth upon That Subject And notwithstanding the *good Design* of that Author, which was to tell what, he thinks, the Scripture teaches us about the Trinity; yet the greater Number of *Divines* say he has mistaken it. Suppose he has: Yet how easie is it for one to mistake, in a *deduction* so long as This was? And therefore how readily to be forgiven, for his *Good Intentions*, and *painful Endeavours*, to separate what is of mere Humane Authority from what is Scriptural? Do you think it now even possible, without a Miracle, to bring all Thinking Men to an *Unanimity* in these Points? Do you find them *agreed* in any *One Speculative* Point Universally? *Actions*, which are all in our own Power, and are the proper Subjects of Laws, yet never have been so well regulated, as to make them *Uniform*; and do you think that *Notions* and *Speculations*, to which we cannot but assent according to the degrees of Evidence we meet with, can? Do you find that outward *Actions*, which are the Effects of *Freedom*, are controulable exactly to your Mind? and can you hope for such a regulation of *Necessary* internal Acts?

Do you think it possible ever to make the Men of *any One Profession*, perfectly unanimous in every thing relating to their Business? Will the Lawyers ever be unanimous about some ambiguous Acts of Parliament? Or do
you

you imagine the *Faculty* it self rather to be endanger'd by their Disagreement? Is *Physick* in danger, because the Gentlemen of that Denomination have disputed much, and do dispute freely, about the Nature, Effects, and Operations of different Medicines? If the *External Peace* of *These Professions* is very well preserved, notwithstanding these and a great many other Differences in Opinion; I shall only say, as our Blessed Saviour did to the Lawyer, concerning the Tender-hearted Compassionate good and Charitable *Samaritan*; *Go and do Thou likewise.*

Neither is it at all *necessary* to the *Peace of the Church*, to have an *Identity* of Thought. Were an *Uniformity* of Opinions absolutely *necessary*, the Church cou'd never possibly have had any Peace; for there were Dissensions in Opinions even in the Apostles Times, and amongst the Apostles themselves. Nor did our Saviour, or the Apostles, ever endeavour to establish the Church upon the Foundation of *Uniformity* of Thought, but upon *Peace* and *Love* and *Charity*, and *mutual Tendernefs* and *Forbearance*. Again, If *Identity* of Thought be necessary to the *External Peace of the Church*, then 'tis *impossible* that the *Peace of the Church* can be obtain'd without it. But 'tis *Possible* that the *Peace* of the Church may as well be obtain'd by other Means, viz. *Charity* and *mutual Love* and *Peaceableness*. Therefore *Identity* of Thought,

is not *necessary* to the External Peace of the Church. Look but into the Description of Charity in the 13 *ch.* of the *First Ep.* to the *Corinthians*; and see if 'tis possible, where *that* is our Director, to fail of Peace. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; Charity envieth not, — doth not behave it self unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no Evil; rejoiceth not in Iniquity, but rejoiceth in the Truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* Men of this Temper, can be no other than Peaceable, and acting upon this Principle *may* make, nay *must* make the Peace of the Church to flourish as much as any Uniformity of Thought can.

Lastly, Consider if God himself ever propos'd or design'd that Men shou'd have an *Uniformity of Thought*. Nothing is more certain, than that *Complexion*, and *Natural Temper*, variously influences the Mind; that Men come into the World with different *Parts* and *Capacities*, with *Abilities* as different as *Looks*, and *Understandings* as various as their *Faces*. The Design of the Almighty in making our *Air* and *Mien* and *Look* so very *different*, was plainly to *avoid* That *Confusion*, which exact *Uniformity* would have produced. But had our *Capacities* been all the *same*, and every *Mans Mind* and *Thought* been in *Speculations* the *same*, would not as *bad Consequences* have arose from thence also? Your proposing

proposing it as *necessary* to the *Tranquillity* of the Church, looks as if a *Mighty Good* might be expected from it. But since God who is infinitely Wise, has thought fit to make it otherwise; 'tis plain the Rule which he design'd that we should walk by, is, not so much to attempt an *Identity*, as strenuously to pursue *Honesty, Sincerity, Love, Charity, Forbearance, Meekness*, ; for the exercise of which Virtues, there would in *your* Scheme be little Room.

But leaving what Experience convinces every one of, the *Impossibility of Identity of Opinion*; I shall consider in the next place, 2dly, What Obligations we are under as *Christians*. The Scriptures, I think, are evidently with me; never so much as mentioning any thing like an *Uniformity of Opinion*, much less *injoining* it; but every where insisting upon *Honesty, Peaceableness, Forbearance, Love and Charity*, as the grand Cements of Christianity. Our Saviour, knowing the Variety of Opinions which were in his *own* Times, and foreseeing the much greater which would rise after his Death; wisely enjoin'd Love and Charity to his Disciples, as their *peculiar Mark and Characteristick*; *By this shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye Love one another*. The Gospel is call'd the Gospel of Peace, Rom. 10, 15. At the Birth of our Saviour, the Angels sung, *Peace upon Earth*; and when he died, his Legacy was, *Peace I leave unto you, my Peace I give unto you*, Joh.

14, 27. And indeed that our Lord design'd no such thing as an *Uniformity* of Notions in Speculations, is evident from his leaving some matters of the highest Concern in such general and ambiguous Expressions, as are fairly capable of two or three different Meanings. Read but the Evangelists, and see if ever our Saviour has determined *How, He and his Father are One?* Has he determined the *Manner of his Incarnation?* No. He has express'd himself in such comprehensive Words, as are very differently expounded by a great many very *Honest, Pious, Sincere* Searchers after Truth. He has enjoined no Man to be more Minute and Circumstantial, than He himself has been; but has constantly inculcated upon All, *Humility, Meekness, Love and Peace*. And why shou'd Men be more rigid and severe, than God? Why shou'd any one be branded for *Heresy*, and perhaps excommunicated, and thrown out of the Pale of the Church, for Notions *not inconsistent* with our Saviour's own Doctrines?

If we pass from our Saviour to the Apostles, we meet with exactly the same Spirit of *Love and Peace*. *Practical Duties* are press'd home, and the severest Threats are denounc'd against such as break them, or endeavour to alienate Mens Minds from one another; But not a word about *Identity of Thought*. The Rules laid down by the Apstles are to *Walk*
worthy

worthy of the Vocation wherein we are call'd, with all Lowliness and Meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another: To endeavour to keep the Unity of the Spirit: How? in the Bond of Peace, not in Identity of Thought, Eph. 4, 2, 3. To follow after the things which make for Peace. And 1 Cor. 10. 29, St. Paul puts this remarkable Question, *why is my Liberty judged of another Man's Conscience?* And again, *above all things put on Charity, which is the bond of Perfection.*

These are but a few of the innumerable Passages which might be cited from the New Testament to this purpose. From which I beg leave to observe, that as the Apostles, and our Saviour too, chose to express themselves in such a Latitude, and to recommend Peace and Unity; He who abridges That Latitude of theirs, endeavours to make the Way to Heaven narrower, than God himself has made it. He that observes the Rules of God, and steadily maintains His Terms of Acceptance, and (as much as in him lies) lives *peacably* with all Men; has God on his side, and therefore needs not fear that he is mistaken. If a King declares to his Subjects expressly, *what is the Service* he expects from them, and *what Obedience* will make them capable of his best and greatest Favours; what Opinion wou'd one conceive of any of his Officers, who shou'd require other Terms than what the King himself

self requires in order to gain Admission to his Presence? Wou'd it not be unsupportable Tyranny in them, to *arrogate a Power* which was *never committed* to them, and to abuse the Subjects in so palpable a manner? If the King commands only a *Peaceable Temper*, and a *ready Obedience* to his Commands; but his Officers should insist upon a *refined Genius*, a *comprehensive Wit*, *large Capacities* or at least a *ready Assent* to what the Men of such Genius think fit to give out as the Kings Meaning; would not this be an Imposition, which in other Cases is very criminal? But I proceed to consider the Absurdity and Impracticableness of your Scheme, if you consider Men,

3dly, As Protestants. I know not whether this Argument taken from the *Right of Private Judgment* shou'd not rather have been brought under the first Head, where I considered the *Impossibility of Uniformity of Thought*, if we consider'd Men as Men. For sure it is, that Men as *Rational Creatures*, and vested with Powers of judging and choosing, ought to *make use* of those Powers unless the Giver of those Powers has restrain'd them. But if the Argument has its weight I'm very little solicitous whether I make it a *Particular and Eminent Principle of Protestants*, or consider it as the *common Right of Mankind*. *Quorsum mihi Conscientia, si secundum alienam Conscientiam est vivendum*

Ex moriendum? To what End, saith Gerson, have I a Conscience given me, if I must live and die according to another Man's Conscience? In Truth, Practice and Experience is so universally contrary to *implicita* Faith, that I can't but be surpris'd at the Conduct of such as insist upon it. For in fact every body judges for himself so far, as to take the Liberty of *censuring* the Men of the Opposite Side of the Question.

But to proceed. Consider with your self, that if ever you attempt to make a Proselyte to the Church, you must necessarily allow him a *Judgment of Discretion*. You must offer him your *Reasons*, and you take it for granted that they have their weight, and that he is *capable of Judging* of them, or else you write upon the Waters: You make no scruple of owning upon such an Occasion, that God has given to every Man discerning Faculties: That it is not a sufficient excuse for any one to say He was born a Dissenter. No: You will tell him, A Man is to *shake off* the *Prejudices of Education*, and candidly to give in to Truth where-ever he finds it: That otherwise 'tis Chance only, which brings a Man to Heaven: That if the Argument is good for a Man's continuance in a Religion because he was born in it; a Turk must necessarily continue a Turk; Nay our Blessed Lord himself, cou'd never have propos'd to convert

one single Jew; nor the Apostles after him, One Heathen; nor our present Society for Propagating the Gospel in foreign Parts, one Indian or American; unless we suppose them Judges of what is offer'd to them. 'Tis necessary therefore, and the consonant Practice of every body, to allow every one a Right of Judging for himself; and then I doubt you'll meet with but little Encouragement for an absolute Uniformity.

Further: If you take away this Liberty of Propheſying, and deny Men the Use of Reason and Judging for ones self, what wou'd you have substituted in its Room? The Scriptures? But how shall I know the Meaning of the Scripture? For That, you refer me to the Authority of the Church. You mean, only when the Church ordains or constitutes what is agreeable to the Scriptures, or what is Reasonable in itself: And here a Judgment of Discretion comes in again. No one can submit himself to another, be it Church or Private Person, but he must have some Reason to do so: He must think it better to do so than not; that is he judges, for himself.

Again: If the Word of God himself be of any weight with you, That has clearly determined in favour of Private Judgment. St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians, to prove all things, and hold fast that which is Good, ch. 5, 21. and Acts 17, 11. commends the Bereans,

Bereans, for searching the Scriptures daily, and examining whether those things, which he preach'd unto them, were so. St. Peter, 1 Ep. Chap. 3, 15, bids us be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh us a Reason of the Hope that is in us. And St. John commands us, to Try the Spirits whether they are of God, 1 Ep. 4, 1; for this very reason, lest we shou'd be deceiv'd, because many false Prophets are gone out into the World. But we have a greater Testimony still, than that of the Apostles; even That of our Blessed Lord Himself, Who gave it as a Positive Command, and a sure way, of coming to the Truth, John 5. 39. Search the Scriptures; And Matt. 23. 9. Call no Man your Father upon the Earth. If every one therefore must judge for himself, and choose his Religion; what will become of your Scheme of the Necessity of Uniformity of Opinion, to the Peace and Tranquillity of the Church? To be plain with you; 'Tis only Humane Considerations, Interest, Ambition, a Perverse Will, and a desire of lording it over the Heritage of God, that make Men desire a Humane Judge of Religious Controversies. If Men were but once perswaded, that Religion consisted in striving to please God, in a good Life, in strict Holiness, in Virtue, and good Morals; and not in intricate Questions which puzzle the Head, but never touch the Heart; this Controversie would soon be at an End.

The Differences among Christians, which you so much dread, and which is truly a Panick only; must cease in course. For what Christian ever disputed whether he were to *Love God with all his Heart*, whether he were to *Pray to Him for what he wants*, or to *Praise Him for what he has*? What Christian ever questioned or controverted, whether He were to *do Justice* to his Neighbour, to be *kind and Charitable* to the *Afflicted and Distressed*, Or to live *Soberly, Temperately, and Chastly*, himself? All the parts of Christianity are so plain and easie even to the meanest Capacity; every Duty, so clear; that none but Idiots can misunderstand them. "It was never the intent of the Holy Ghost," says the ever Memorable Mr. Hales in his Sermon on *John 14, 27*, "to make it a Matter of wit and Subtlety to know how to be saved. Bring me a Soul, not one deeply learned, sharp and subtil, Sed Simplicem, rudem, & impolitam & qualem habet qui eam solum habet, (as Tertulian speaks,) such an one as that Man hath that has nothing else but his Soul to witness him to be a Man; and even this shall with ease apprehend what is necessary to save him." Were once Religion reduced to the *Bounds of Scripture*; and nothing taught as *necessary*, which is not there made *necessary*; the Disputes in Theology

logy wou'd quickly come to be handled with the same Temper, that Controversies in Philosophical Matters are Christians wou'd be united; their Storms wou'd soon blow over; and in Consequence, the *External Peace and Tranquillity* of the Church wou'd be restored and flourish. But whilst Persecutions for Opinions, not determin'd in Scripture, are carried on; whilst Men are debarr'd of their Natural Rights of examining Truth and the Will of God, whom they profess to serve; whilst Men are of an Opinion *without Reasoning or Judging* for themselves, or *knowing* whether it be true or false; you must always expect Opposition from them that will search, if they find Authority not rightly grounded; and for the Rest, *Their Religion and Service is at best but the Sacrifice of Fools.* But

4thly and Lastly. If we consider our selves as *Members of the Church of England*, we are not obliged to an *Uniformity of Opinion*; from whence I infer, that in the *Judgment of our own Church*, *Uniformity of Opinion* is not thought *necessary to Her Peace*. In proof of this, I need only observe, that *Subscription* is required *Only in the Literal, Grammatical Sense of the Articles*. Since the Royal Declaration of King James the 1st. *That no Man thereafter shou'd put his own Sense or Comment to the Meaning*

Meaning of the Article, but shou'd take it in the *Literal and Grammatical Sense*; we find (as the late Bishop Burnet has well observed,) that the *Fierceness of the Disputes* then so much convuls'd, has gone off. Several of the *Articles*, 'tis certain, are capable of very *different Senses*; and each of these *Senses* are *literal and Grammatical*. Which since the *Persons who require the Subscriptions*, are full well appriz'd of; if the *Legislature* do not think fit to determine in *what particular Sense* the *Subscriber* shall give his Assent, it is very possible and well known that *Persons of quite Opposite Opinions* may and do *Subscribe*. The *Sense*, which such as require *Subscriptions*, *accept or Tolerate*; is to be the *Rule of Subscriptions*. Since the *Church* therefore *accepts or Tolerates contrary Opinions*, 'tis plain the *Church* does not conceive *Identity of Opinion* necessary to her *Tranquillity*.

I think I have said enough, to shew How *unreasonable and unpracticable* your Scheme is. And since there are but *Two Expedients* possible; the *One*, to bring *Mankind* to think the *same thing*, which is manifestly impossible without a *Miracle*; we must e'en sit down contented with the *Other*, be *firm and steady to the Word of God*, and bear with each *Other* in our *different Opinions*, with *Love and Charity*, with *Tenderness and mutual Forbearance*.

But

But I must not conclude, till I have removed an *Objection* or two, which seem very natural and obvious. The 1st. is taken from that famous Passage in the Second Epistle of St Peter, ch. 10, *No Scripture is of Private Interpretation*. From whence it has been concluded, that *Private Persons* are directly forbid to interpret the Scriptures, or to pretend to a *Judgment of Discretion*.

That this Consequence is wrongly deduced from this Passage of Scripture, is evident, because it plainly is not the Meaning of the Text. The Words of it are, *οὐκ ἔστιν ἰδιωτικὴ ἐρμηνεία τῶν γραμμάτων τῆς προφητείας*. The meaning of which Words may be, either, *all Prophecy of Scripture, is not of Private Interpretation*; Which surely is as different from *No Prophecy of Scripture is of Private Interpretation*, as *all* and *some*: Or thus, *All Prophecy of Scripture is not of a particular Interpretation*, i. e. relating to one particular *Act* or *History*; Those Prophecies of the Old Testament, which speak seemingly of the Times in which the Prophets lived, have a *further meaning* often, and relate to the Times of the *Messiah*: Or *Lastly*, The Meaning may be, *All Scripture-Prophecy doth not contain the Private Sense or Notion of the Prophet, but of the Holy Ghost who inspired Him*. These Expositions are all *Literal* and *Grammatical*, besides Others which I might mention; And all

all of them are directly exclusive of such a Notion, as would infer a *Prohibition* of the Liberty of Prophecyng. The *first* of these, is a naked, literal Translation; and all that can be drawn from it, supposing it true, is only, that *some is not* of Private Interpretation, and *some is*. *Some is* not for every Person to interpret; and which that *some is*, must be confined to the Text, viz. *Prophecy*. As (no doubt) the *Prophetical* Books are the most *difficult*, and require much *Study* and *Pains* to interpret them; the Apostle might very well say, that *They were not for every Private Man* to Interpret. But what is this to every Man's *judging for himself* in matters which relate to *himself*, in the Articles of his Faith and Practice? If the *2d.* be the Meaning of the Words, they have no relation to any thing of *Private Judgment* at all. If the *3d.* (which seems very probable, both from what goes before and follows;) it plainly makes nothing against me. St. *Peter* tells the Persons to whom he wrote, that they shou'd *mind the sure Word of Prophecy*, as they would do a *Light that shines in a dark place*: For the Prophets did not *make* it themselves; they did not, nor could, from their own Minds *invent*, or *suggest* what should *afterwards* happen; But *God* put the Thoughts in their Hearts, and the Words in their Mouths, by which they foretold what since has happen'd. For *Prophecy*

phety came not in Old time by the Will of Man, but Holy Men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

But let this or any other be the Meaning of these Words, 'tis certain that this Text contains a Confutation of *their* Exposition, who would urge it against *Private Judgment*. For let us take it for granted that the Words, *All Prophecy of Scripture*, signify, *the whole Body of Scripture*: Does not St Peter bid us *attend* to it? But to What End must we *attend* to it, unless to be *instructed* by it? And how can we be *instructed*, unless we learn the *Meaning* of it? And can we learn the *Meaning* of it, unless we *judge* and discriminate the true Sense from the false Glosses put upon it? Does he not *commend* the Persons to whom he wrote, for their *Attention*? Does he not say expressly, that they *did well* in so doing? What is it that He recommends as a Principle to them, but to *know*? And how can People *know*, unless they are able to *judge*? So that I think it no hasty Conclusion, if I assert that St Peter evidently never intended by these Words to *exclude* a *Liberty of Prophecying*. Had That been his Meaning, he had no Occasion in this very Chapter to wish that *Peace* might be *multiplied* unto them; or to exhort them, v. 7, to *add* to their

Godliness Brotherly Kindness, and to their Brotherly Kindness Charity; or to have concluded his Epistle with an Exhortation to them, to be diligent that they might be found of God in Peace; ch. 3, 14; For where there is no Difference in Opinions, there can be no Want of Peace. A

2d. Objection, and which has indeed the Face of an Argument for the Necessity of Identity of Opinion, is taken from 1 Cor 1. 10. I beseech you by the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same things, and that there be no Divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly join'd together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment. And in several other Places, we are bid to be of One Mind, like minded, &c. which seems commanding an Impossibility, unless an Identity of Opinion be attainable.

To this I reply 1st, That to be perfectly join'd together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment, is plainly oppos'd to, let there be no Divisions among you. Men may therefore in the Apostle's Sense be of the same Mind and Judgment, tho' they differ in their Opinions, if they do it peaceably, with Love and Charity. 2dly, To be of the same Mind, is plainly oppos'd to the Contentions among Them at Corinth, where each Man was for setting up for the Head of a Faction; I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and

and I of Cephas, and I of Christ; as if Paul or Apollos or Cephas had founded Religions, or at least some Particular Sects, distinct from what Christ had founded. These Names of Sects or Parties St Paul presses them earnestly to lay aside, and to agree unanimously in the Name (and in That only) of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Now What has this Text to do with Differences of Opinions in Divinity? It presses home indeed upon such as choose to distinguish themselves by the Names of Men in Christianity; I am of Athanasius, I am of Arius, I am of Socinus, I am of Nestorius, &c. Whereas if Men had kept to the Words of God, and had been perfectly joined in the same Mind to adhere to Christ and Him only; Had they despis'd the Schools of all Men, and, as St. Paul himself did, determined not to know any thing save Jesus Christ, and him crucified; Had they despis'd the enticing Words of Mens Wisdom, and adher'd to the Wisdom of God; This had been Christian Unanimity; This had been to be in the same Judgment in Religion, though they differed widely about infinite other matters. 3dly, To be join'd together in the same Mind here, is the same as to be of One Mind, to be like-minded in other places, where the Expression is always *to have one mind* or *to be of one mind*. Now these the Apostle explains every where

where, by, having the same Love, Phil. 2, 2, That ye be like-minded, having the same Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind, ~~all serving~~ minding the One thing. Rom. 12, 16, Being of the same Mind One towards Another, Ch. 13, 5, to be like-minded One towards another, i. e. To Do to each other as they would be done by. This Proceeding is as consistent with *Diversity of Opinions*, as with the strictest *Uniformity*. *Lastly*; If by one Mind was meant *Uniformity of Thoughts and Opinions*, there cou'd be no occasion for such a frequent charge of *Charity and Peaceableness*, for the Reason just before mentioned, A

3d. And very material *Objection* is, That this must necessarily bring in a *Medley of all Religions*. To make every Man able to judge for himself, or to have *Judgment of Discretion*; and to *Tolerate* with *Love and Charity* those which in some Things dissent from us; and, *Lastly*, to make no more necessary, than what is contained in the *Evangelists*: What is this but to bring in a *Colluvies*, a *Hodge-podge* of Religions? Is not this, to be *Indifferent* to any and to all Religions? What Fatal Consequences do we feel from the few *Sectaries* we have in *England* already! And what must we feel, if these Principles obtain'd *Universally*!

Mens Passions (I am sensible) run so high,
when

especially when warm'd with Zeal for a particular Tenet or Party, that I know beforehand nothing will keep them from exclaiming immediately, *It is easy*. However, I think the Objection so easy, that, if the Scriptures are of any Force, or contain any thing True, or are at all to be the Rule of our Actions and of our Faith, the meanest Capacity must be able to answer it. As 1st. We are expressly enjoin'd by our Lord himself, *to Love our Neighbour as our selves*, Luke 10, 27. And, lest we should confine that Term to our Relations, to near Inhabitants or to our Countrymen, or even our Friends and Allies; Our Saviour has asserted even a profess'd Enemy to our Religion, as much an Enemy as a Samaritan was to a Jew, to be comprehended in the Word Neighbour, v. 36, 37. If therefore our Love and Charity is to extend so far, it must necessarily take in Dissenters from us. 2^{dly}, If St Luke asserts, as I have proved already, that his Gospel contains *All the Fundamental Articles of Faith*, He must be credited; and He that believes him inspired, must give into his Assertions, notwithstanding these imagined terrible Consequences. There is ten times more reason to believe these Consequences to be falsely deduced, and therefore the Fear groundless; than to disbelieve St Luke in a plain, easy, certain, positive Assertion,

tion. And if it be true that St Luke asserts This: Then they must be his Positions, that are so exclaim'd against. 3dly, If Dissentions and Heresies would necessarily arise from a Liberty of Prophecyng; then 'tis plain that the Present Consent, Concord and Unanimity, (such as it is,) is wholly owing to this Liberty's being taken away: i. e. It arises from Mens not having the Liberty to examine and judge for themselves. Then 'tis plain it doth not arise from the intrinsic force of Truth, and from the Powers of the Christian Religion; for of these, Men must not judge, and therefore cannot perceive or know them. 4thly, 'Tis allowed by All, that every Man ought to examine into the Truth of the Christian Religion, and to be able to prove it against Turks or Jews or Infidels; at least, All who arrive at such a degree of Knowledge, have that Testimony which the Bereans had from the Apostle, of acting a noble Part. Can any reason be assign'd why they may not proceed further, and judge for themselves to what Body of Christians they should join? If it be lawful to examine the Truth of Christianity, they must either live Christians at large, or They must examine which Body of them comes up nighest to Christ's Institution; which are purest, and which holds such Terms of Communion as can best be conform'd

form'd to. *ysbly*, Unless God has determin'd some *Judge of Controversies*, every Man must *judge for himself*. God has given to every Man Rational Faculties; and Understanding, and Will, and Capacities large enough to take in all that is *necessary* to Salvation. Can any reason be given, why any one must be obliged to understand with *Another's* Understanding, rather than to see with *Another's* Eyes, or hear with *another Man's* Ears? Had God indeed determin'd in his Word, that we shou'd resign our Understandings to any one, and implicitly follow their Determinations; Man had had reason to muffle up his Mind, and follow blindly. But hitherto no Passage of Scripture has been brought to prove it, but many are very express to the contrary. And the Reason of the Practice has been founded on such strange Principles, as any one can see through. There must (say the *Papist*, and all who agree with them in depriving Men of the Right of Judging for themselves,) There must be *no such Liberty* permitted. Why? Because ten Thousand ill Consequences arise from it. The Bottom of which, is This Mistake; That God has determin'd, or 'tis reasonable, to take away whatever may produce ill Consequences. Weak Men! that do not see how much Corruption, and what a Deluge of Sin there

there is in the World, from our being made *Free Agents*; and yet a Good and Just and All-wise God *permits* it. 6thly, No Man can imagine that I plead for a *Toleration* of any thing that is contrary to *Goodness*, or the *Publick Interests* of *Societies*. If any thing tends to destroy *Peace*, and *Quietness*, *Obedience*, or any *Virtue*; it's quite foreign to my Design. All that I plead for, is; *That Points* purely *Speculative*, not *determined by God*, at least not *clearly*; should not be *imposed as Divine*. Call them *Hypotheses*, *Schemes*, *Opinions*, *Notions*, or what you please; but let their *Credit* run no higher than their *Authors*, who are mere *Men*. 7thly, But the very *Foundation* of this *Mormo* would be taken away, if *Men* would not call *every Opinion* by the Name of *Religion*. Which is just as if a *Man* were to call every different *Lawyer's Opinion*, *A New Law*; or every *Physician's Opinion*, *New Physick*. Is it in any tolerable *Sense* call'd an *Indifference to Statute-Law*, if one says that *every Man* concerned in an *Act of Parliament*, has a *Right of Judging* of its *Meaning*? Is there not a *Motive* great enough, an *Eternal Weight of Glory*, to make one use ones *best Endeavours* to find out the true *Meaning* of *God's Words*? Will not sincere *Men* make use of the *best Assistance* they can, to learn his *Will*? Do they

they not pledge their Souls upon it? And what Security can possibly be given greater, for *Honesty* and *Sincerity*? Let Men be but fully perswaded of the *Necessity* of *Peace* and *Charity*, of *Love*, and mutual *Forbearance*; and the very *Ground* of *Diversity* of *Religions*, if they must be call'd so, will vanish. Let *Truth* be asserted; and use the same *Industry* to propagate it, as any one does for *Error*; and I cannot but be perswaded that the *God* of *Truth* will more *directly* interpose on its behalf. But when *Truth* is propagated by all the *Arts* of *Satan*, and is thought to stand in need of *Force*; when Mens understandings are to be captivated, not to or by the *Words* of *God*, but the *Humours*, *Fancies* or *Intrigues* of Men; when Religion is made a *Stalking-Horse* to *Tyranny*, *Ambition*, and all sorts of *Wickedness*; *God* gives us up to *vile Affections*, and to a *reprobate Mind*: He permits the *Spirit* of *Delusion* to possess us, when we tamely give up the *Powers* which he vested us with on purpose to keep us right. We first forsake him, by forsaking our own selves; and then He in Justice forsakes us. Lastly; I do not plead for or allow of such a *Licence*, as is imagined in the *Objection*. If Men abuse the *Liberty* of their *Understandings*, they shall be one day as much accountable for that, as for any abuse of the

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Liberty

Liberty of their Wills. This Abuse, Man indeed cannot controul, or meddle with; as being strictly, *alieni Juris*: He must leave it to God, and His Judgments; to which they belong; and whose Servants, especially in These Cases, we are. And it is laid upon the Consciences of every one, as they will answer it at the last day, not to grow licentious if they have Christian Liberty. If any Man, or if an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which Christ and the Apostles preached unto you, let him be accursed. If for by Ends and Advantages, thro' Ambition, Interest, Pride, or Covetousness, or any other such Mean-spirited, base and servil, or wicked Ends; any one attempts to add to, or to take away from, the Words of Life; The Searcher of all Hearts will one Day with Justice and Severity judge such Insolence. Be therefore but Honest and Sincere in your Endeavours to find out the Will of God; be Charitable to All, and convince them of their Errors in a Spirit of Meekness, and by a Life of Virtue and strict Obedience; and you'll be accounted by Jesus Christ a good and faithful Servant, tho' here perhaps calumniated and abused.

4thly, The Last Objection is: If Uniformity of Opinion be so impossible as is here repre-

represented, and if Men must judge for themselves; to what End is Church-Government and Authority? In what Sense must we understand those Words of the 20th Article of our Church, *The Church hath Power to decree Rights and Ceremonies; and Authority in Matters of Faith.*

Our Church is (I think) the best Expounder of her own Meaning, and has removed this Objection, by telling us expressly, *The Holy Scripture containeth All things necessary to Salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any Man, that it should be believed as an Article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to Salvation.* And in this very Article, besides the same (Holy writ,) ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for Necessity of Salvation. From which Passages I argue 1st. That by *Authority in Matters of Faith*, the Church means no more than a Power to declare what Articles of Faith are necessary to Salvation. And these cannot be besides, or what is not contain'd in Scripture. 2^{dly}, The Church does not, cannot mean, an *Authority to make or enforce any thing as necessary to Salvation*, which our Saviour and the Apostles never did: For this would be contrary to that direct Assertion, *That Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to Salvation.* 3^{dly}, If by *Authority*, the Church

Church means a Power to determine all Controversies of Faith, and to make Men submit to her Determinations; She must assume to her self an Infallibility in Matters of Faith, which She has actually disclaim'd, Article 19th. 4thly, If therefore Any one shou'd plead the Authority of the Church's Determination of a Point of Speculation not contain'd in Scripture, 'tis plain he gives the Church a Power She never had, nor ever pretended to, 5thly, The Church has Authority in matters of Faith. Authority, to or for What? Is it Authority to determine, to decrea, to enforce, to declare, to perswade? Or what Word is to be supplied in that place? Plain it is, there is an Ellipsis; and any of the former Words may be, or a great many others, put in to fill up the Sense. Which since the Church has not thought fit to do, we must by the King's Declaration construe it in the Best and Truest Literal Grammatical sense. Lastly, The Church has no doubt an Authority of Order, and a Jurisdiction, to which All are as much obliged, as to any Civil Courts. But more than this, as the Church wou'd not desire to have, because 'twou'd be unjustifiable; so tw'ou'd be betraying our own Rights of searching the Scriptures, to allow it.

I know not if what I have laid down here, will be agreeable to you, or not,
con-

concerning these very momentous Points.
 All I contend for, is, *Peace* and *Charity*, and the *Scriptures* in their just *Latitude*. And I assure you, to the best of my Power I practice these Rules my self; not without finding the Benefit of them in the *Ease* of my Mind, and in a *Progress* in my *Christian Warfare*. I contend for *Peace*, and therefore shall continue, tho' I shou'd happen at last to be found of a different Opinion from you, yet to be nevertheless,

S I R,

Your Affectionate Friend—

March, 27th,
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